

WCB Roundup

The newsletter of Wales Council for the Blind

Summer 2011



In this issue: Audio Services

Looking ahead: WCB progresses its plans for the future

At last year's AGM, WCB's membership agreed to explore looking at merging with Sight Support and Vision Support, two sight loss charities operating across the south east and north of Wales. After lots of hard work, WCB will soon begin consulting on the outcome of this decision.

WCB proposes to form a new registered charity with Sight Support. Vision Support will be key partners in this, taking part in core projects in North Wales. The new charity will look to launch in April 2012.

The reasons why we want to merge are very simple. We want:

1. to deliver more services for people with a visual impairment in more parts of Wales
2. to keep duplication and waste to an absolute minimum
3. to continue support for independent clubs and societies that are so important for the delivery of local services.

The new agency proposes to continue to be a membership agency, just like WCB is currently. The work that we undertake will continue to be directed by the many local charities across Wales.

WCB believes that the plan that we'll be sharing with Wales over the autumn delivers against these core intentions, and we're excited about coming to tell you about them over the next few months.

We'll shortly be sending out a draft business plan for formal consultation ahead of our next AGM in December, when WCB's membership will be asked to vote on whether to accept it or not.

However, before this, we'll be looking to come and present our ideas

to the many agencies in Wales. WCB has always believed that local independent charities are essential for people with a visual impairment which is why we want to come and hear your thoughts on our ideas.

Hearing the thoughts of the many local clubs and societies in Wales will give us the greatest chance of creating a new agency that delivers the best for our members.

If you'd like to have WCB come and talk about its plans at one of your meetings, please contact us on 02920 473 954, or by email to phil@wcb-ccd.org.uk to let us know a date that is suitable.

Annual Wales Eyecare Conference 2011

This free-to-attend conference would appeal to professionals working in the eye care sector - from rehab officers to ophthalmologists.

There will be a series of talks on topics ranging from depression to research into a cure for blindness. Also, a number of organisations will be on hand to present their work in the lunchtime drop-in sessions.

The conference takes place on Wednesday 21 September from 9 am to 4.30 pm at:

The School of Optometry and Vision Sciences
Cardiff University
Maindy Road
Cardiff
CF24 4LU.

To find out more or book a place, please contact Rebecca Phillips at WCB on 029 2047 3954, or visit WCB's website www.wcb-ccd.org.uk and use the on-line booking form.

On the road with WCB

Naomi Beckett captures some of the comments from the recent round of roadshows.

Over the summer we've been busy holding six Road Shows for visually impaired people across Wales.

Along with our partners - Sight Support, Guide Dogs, Vision Support, Cardiff Vales & Valleys, RNIB Cymru and North Wales Society for the Blind – we've given people the opportunity to voice their opinions, concerns, viewpoints and experiences regarding the NHS and other services, find out about and try out the latest visual aids, gain support and much, much more!

"Today has been really helpful"

"Road Show is very good. Looking at the different stalls is very useful."

We've been travelling around finding out your views on social services, hospitals and eye clinics, transport services and local associations and have gained some useful feedback on areas you are happy with and those which you think could be improved.

One common theme of frustration seemed to be public transport signs and bus timetables being too small. Other comments include

"my main frustration is unexpected steps"

"In my opinion, social services are quite good and fast"

"Lady from Sight Support goes round the people waiting and is very helpful." (experience from an Eye Clinic patient)

"I use trains and ask for support, which I get. They really put themselves out" (experience of using public transport)

"I use local buses and the drivers all know me which helps" (public transport user)

"Brilliant services from North Wales Society"

Pontypool support workers up for award

Lissa Gomer, Eye Clinic Liaison Officer, and the team at Sight Support, Emma Richards and Jason Grubb, have been put forward for the Macular Disease Society's annual 'Support Service of the Year' award for their efforts to help improve the treatment, care, and quality of life of people with the condition. The service has had a presence in the Royal Gwent Hospital's Eye Clinic for the past 6 years, helping to provide advice and reassurance to patients affected by visual impairments.

The winners of the award will be announced at the Macular Disease Society's annual conference. Best of luck to Lissa and the team.

Audio Services

Each edition of Roundup focuses on a theme: in this quarter we're focusing on some of the audio services available. Rhian Evans talks about the history and future of the former Casetiau Cymraeg, the service that has produced over 2,000 audio books in Welsh since 1979. Erika James gives a personal account of her work audio describing theatre performances in Wales. We take a look at Colin Antwis' Fieldsman Trails, a system of audio description to accompany nature walks - out of doors or even at home! Insight Radio reports from Glasgow and RNIB Cymru unveils its Welsh Talking Book service.

The next edition will focus on emotional support, counselling and related services.

Please contact richard@wcb-ccd.org.uk (or telephone Richard on 029 20 473954) if you would like to write something about the service you or your organisation offers in relation to the theme or on vision impairment in general. The provisional deadline is November 1st, 2011.

Llyfrau Llafar Cymru Talking Books Wales

Rhian Evans talks about the past and future of Welsh language talking books.

When I was first registered blind in the early 1970's, I made enquiries about the availability of Welsh literature on tape. I found that there was very little indeed, especially of the latest Welsh publications.

With the support of the county Librarian at the time, Mr R. Alun Edwards, and money from the government's Job Creation Schemes, the Welsh Cassettes Scheme was established in a small room at the Carmarthen Library in 1979. This funding continued for a number of years and gave temporary employment to young people who were unemployed. So, although there was a regular turnover of staff, I was always retained as the supervisor of the scheme.

Gradually a large collection of both Welsh and English books about Wales were recorded and distributed to visually impaired people throughout Wales and beyond. The recordings have all been done by a variety of volunteers and whenever possible, we have invited the authors themselves to record their work at the Carmarthen studio. We have always been greatly encouraged by the excellent reception the service has received from listeners.

When the Job Creation Schemes came to an end, The North Wales Society for the Blind agreed to take over the funding of the Scheme in 1989. I continued as the supervisor, and Linda Williams joined me in 1990 as my assistant and now that I have retired, she has taken over the responsibilities of running the Scheme. We were also able to employ one other part-timer, but we have always depended very heavily on the help of a large team of volunteers to achieve our goal. The work continued to develop and add to the stock and by now we have over 2,000 titles available for distribution. We are now in the process

of becoming digital and transferring our recordings from cassettes to CDs.

Over the years, the County Council have kindly given us office accommodation in Council property. We have had to move home four times over the years, but each time, we have been able to improve our facilities. We have been at our present site since 2004. Before we moved in, the council made a few improvements such as a new kitchen and a disabled toilet. One of our recording engineers built us a first-class recording studio.

At the end of last year, due to the financial climate, The North Wales Society for the Blind told us that they would have to withdraw their support within a few months. A new steering committee was set up in Carmarthen with a view of setting up an independent organisation to continue the service. This steering committee, with the support of Wales Council for the Blind, approached the Welsh Assembly Government to ask for funding. We were met last February by the then Assembly Members - Alun Ffred Jones, the Minister for Culture, Rhodri Glyn Thomas and Nerys Evans, our two local Assembly Members. As a result of that meeting, the Assembly Government agreed to fund the scheme for the first year to the tune of £35,000.

As a newly registered charity called Talking Books Wales, which is a Limited Company under guarantee, we shall now endeavour to ensure the future funding, development and success of the scheme. As the service is free to all registered blind and partially sighted recipients, we shall continue to depend heavily on our own fund raising efforts and on donations from various organisations as well as the generosity of many loyal friends.

We have many plans for the future development and improvement of our service such as the setting up of a website and including our list of recorded titles. For more information about our scheme, please contact Linda Williams, Talking Books Wales, Pensarn Road, Carmarthen SA31 2BT, Telephone, 01267 238225 .

RNIB Cymru's Welsh Language Talking Books Service

75 years after the launch of their first ever talking book, RNIB Cymru's first Welsh language audio book has been created. Ysgol Jacob, a Welsh adaptation of Jacob's Ladder by award-winning author Brian Keaney, is described as a fantastic thriller for teenage readers. The book is narrated by bi-lingual newsreader Garry Owen, the BBC Wales/S4C presenter, and adapted into Welsh by Elin Meek.

Keaney, the author of Jacob's Ladder, said: "I am delighted to hear that Jacob's Ladder has been chosen as the first RNIB Cymru Talking Book in Welsh. It's a great honour. I believe it will work very well as a talking book, and I hope that visually impaired people will empathise with a lot of what they read. This is, after all, a story about an inner journey, a struggle to discover who you are and to understand your place in the world"

The pioneering title follows in the literary footsteps of the first talking book in 1935 – The Murder of Roger Akroyd by Agatha Christie. It has since inspired over 75 million audio books issued to people with sight loss by the RNIB.

RNIB commented on the news by saying: "We have made a major commitment to producing 40 new Welsh Language audio titles a year, and the positive response from authors and narrators in Wales has been absolutely overwhelming"

Twenty new titles are already in production at their recording studios by Welsh authors including Mared Llwyd, Elgan Phillip Davies, Angharad Price, Manon Steffan Ros and Gareth Miles. In common with all RNIB talking books, the recordings are complete and unabridged allowing readers to enjoy the entire book and full reading experience, as the author intended.

Website: <http://www.rnib.org.uk/talkingbooks>

Audio description in the theatre...

Many theatres now provide audio description for selected performances of their productions. As the action of the performance unfolds on the stage, a trained professional describer delivers a commentary and narration about what is happening. This guides the listener through the presentation with concise descriptions of entrances, exits, scene changes, costumes, body language and so on – this is all done inbetween portions of dialogue, not to overlap with the actors. The description is everything the sighted person takes for granted. This service is relayed through infra-red headsets which are available at the box office. It is usually recommended that these are ordered in advance, and a deposit may be required. In some venues, Touch Tours are provided before the start of the performance, giving visually impaired patrons a tactile experience of the set, costumes and props of the show they are about to hear.

Each venue will have its own access procedures for disabled patrons, so please contact your local theatre for more information about specific performances.



Erika James provides audio description for many theatres in Wales. In the following article she provides a fascinating insight into what this involves and tells a personal story of her journey into audio description.

In a describer's world, people never walk. They may swing, or stride, or swagger, or glide, but they never do anything as boring as to walk. Why? Well, because 'walk' is a waste of a good descriptive word. When I have just a few precious seconds to sum up a character and his or her appearance, the way in which someone moves speaks volumes.

I've been providing audio description for twenty years now. Mine is the voice on the other end of the microphone at venues across South Wales and beyond, and even after all this time I still regard it as the best job in the world.

Audio described theatre in Wales began at the Sherman Theatre, in Cardiff, back in the early nineties. Since graduating from the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, I'd worked extensively within the deaf community, qualified as a British Sign Language Interpreter and was regularly interpreting stage shows for deaf people. As I came to know each production backwards, I was, it seemed, a natural choice to launch the Sherman's brand new service for visually impaired theatregoers.

I'd bumbled my way through a couple of shows – not very well, in retrospect – when the phone rang one day. 'How would you like to describe film? We'll train you,' said the disembodied voice.

‘OK,’ I said. ‘Where’s the course?’

‘San Francisco’, the voice said.

‘Wh – where??’

‘San Francisco. Pack your bags.’

That luckiest of lucky breaks meant that I was trained by the late, great Gregory Frazier in the art of live film description, a rare privilege indeed.

My claim to fame – such as it is – is that I was the first professional, live film describer in Europe. I do hope someone inscribes that on my gravestone!

Of course, not all the information I gained in America was appropriate for British audiences. On the other side of the pond, everything is described in literal terms, because the describer should not make value judgments.

So, for example a cinema audience will be gripped as a monster looms over a terrified heroine, screaming her head off and cowering in a corner.

The American description would be: ‘She steps away. Her eyebrows raise and her mouth hangs slack.’

Once back in the UK, I tried this technique out with a few visually impaired friends who were quick to tell me exactly what they thought, so I adapted to suit British audiences. This was the first of many examples of how description has evolved and developed over the years, because visually impaired theatre goers themselves shape it.

Of course, technology overtook live film description, and these days I’ve tried my hand at describing art, cabaret, museum exhibitions, and even buildings, but theatre’s my bag.

Preparing audio description is hard work but fun. I envy some of

the London theatres which have teams of five people working for a fortnight or more on one production. I get four days to work solo, so I create, write and rehearse description at a sizzling warp-factor speed. The live described performances are generally a Saturday matinee show, and scribbling rewrites just minutes before curtain up is par for the course.

Rule Number One for audio describers is that you never, ever step on the actors' lines, so each word of the description has to be timed, written, rewritten and rehearsed to fit neatly into the gaps between the dialogue.

This is where finding a myriad of words to substitute for 'walk' comes into play!

Complex dance routines take an age to write, especially where they incorporate storylines to move the plot along. Everyone's favourite show, *West Side Story*, is a classic example of this. At the end of Act I, there's the famous, and very long, dance scene which incorporates a gang fight and a death. With the characters' emotions running wild, the action is slick and stylised, and since the description has to complement Leonard Bernstein's sweeping and haunting score, too, getting the timing right is crucial.

Ninety nine per cent of the time, shows run like clockwork, of course, and a pre-prepared description script does the job of painting pictures with words.

However, live theatre is, after all, live, and when something doesn't go to plan, describing 'on the hoof' calls for some quick thinking.

Trying not to laugh down the microphone when an unfortunate murder victim crumpled to the floor, displaying her spotty blue knickers to a giggling audience was bit of a trial!

Despite the best efforts of hard working stage management, props and scenery have an uncanny knack of malfunctioning at the critical

moment. Doors can glue themselves shut, or swing wide open, a curtain can jam half way down like sagging babies' knickers, even policemen's whistles may lose their pea!

Attention to detail is always the name of the game, especially during the flu season. One lesson I learned the hard – very hard - way is to track down the company manager beforehand and check that there's a full cast performing, with no last minute understudies. Years on, I still shudder at the memory of carefully describing a beautiful statuesque black actress as she swept on to the stage, only to discover that she'd magically become a bird-like redhead.

Luckily, these traps are rare, and providing audio description is still a treat. I've had masses of help and support and guidance and made some amazing friends on both sides of the footlights.

One thing, though, that you could never say about audio description is that it's a walk in the park. It might be a gallop, or a spring, or even a stagger, but it's never a walk.

Forthcoming described performances:

Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff Bay Tel: 029 2063 6464

The Sound of Music Saturday 27 August, 7.30pm

Oliver! Thursday 22 December 2.30pm and Saturday January 21
7.30pm

New Theatre, Cardiff. Telephone 029 20 878889

Copacabana Saturday 29 October, 2.30pm.

Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat Saturday 12
November, 2pm.

All the Fun of the Fair Saturday 3 December, 2.30pm.

Robinson Crusoe & The Caribbean Pirates Thursday 19 January
7pm and Saturday 21 January 2.30pm.

Swansea Grand Theatre Tel: 01792 475715

Aladdin Saturday 7 January 7pm.

...and in the cinema?

Cinema audio description is a fantastic service for people with sight problems. The normal film soundtrack comes through the cinema's surround sound speakers in the usual way, and a recorded narrator explains what's happening on screen - in gaps in the dialogue - through personal headphones. It's similar to listening to a cricket or football match on the radio - having the action described to you - but with added surround sound, which places you in the middle of the action. The customer needs to collect a headset from the box office (a deposit may be required) and can then sit in any part of the cinema to receive the service. The provision of audio description does not impact other members of the audience, so it should be provided for all screenings of a film when available.

The following cinemas in Wales are equipped to provide audio description:

Aberystwyth National Library of Wales 01970 632548

Aberystwyth Wales Arts Centre

Bridgend: Odeon

Caernarfon, Gwynedd, Galeri

Cardiff: Chapter Arts; Cineworld; Odeon; Vue

Cardigan, Theatr Mwldan

Carmarthenshire, Brynamman: Public Hall cinema

Colywn Bay Conwy: Theatr Colwyn

Llandudno, Conwy: Cineworld

Milford Haven, Pembrokeshire, Torch Theatre

Mold, Flintshire: Clwyd Theatr Cymru

Nantgarw: Showcase - ad only

Newport: Riverfront; Cineworld

Builth Wells: Wyeside Arts Centre (2 screens).

Swansea: Taliesin Arts Centre; Odeon; Vue.

A website www.yourlocalcinema.com provides listings of audio described film performances across the county, making it easy to plan your visit. It also includes details of which DVDs include audio description. All of this information on cinemas and DVDs is available from 'Your Local Cinema' via a telephone helpline – 0845 056 9824.

People who are registered blind, or in receipt of Disability Living Allowance, may be eligible for a Cinema Exhibitors Association Card, which allows them to buy two tickets for the price of one in participating cinemas, so that a companion can accompany them. The CEA Card costs £5.50 and proof of entitlement is required. For more information, telephone 0845 123 1292 or go to the website www.ceacard.co.uk.

Sensory delights

Colin Antwis, of Fieldsmans Trails, shows us how to get back to nature with his innovative systems.

As we all know, over the years the Ordnance Survey have guided us along the highways and byways with many and varied maps. However ask yourself if they always give the information you require, and whether they are in a readily accessible format. For instance, do they show if gates are wide enough to pass; if the foot path is uneven and where the best view hot-spots are located?

Fieldsman Trails devotes itself to the publication of mapping information for the urban and rural environments in alternative formats.

We recognise that whilst physical access within our environment has taken significant leaps forward, the biggest barrier is the lack of information, resulting in people simply not knowing what access

provisions are already available.

In this article I talk about the Tour Guide System and other interactive tour experiences that we offer, which could potentially change your walking-experiences for the better.



Talking the Walk

A few years ago I found myself inspired whilst reading an article that a

young Deafblind lady was to walk The West Highland Way, and began thinking about what memories the woman would bring home from her venture through the countryside. It was this insight that made me think of ways in which tour-guiding could be improved for vision and hearing impaired people.

If you want to make the most of it when it comes to experiencing the great-outdoors, let me introduce you to a communication device called the Tour Guide System. Consisting of a radio mike and a headset, it enables the tour guide to describe – without shouting and on a one-to-one basis - the picturesque countryside as you pass through at your leisure.

One of the main limitations of a normal tour-guide experience is the restrictions of not being able to venture far from the speaker; however the Tour Guide System allows you the freedom to wander, whilst being able to hear the tour-guide as if they were beside you. Using the device, walkers can also switch off and come back to the commentary at any time during the tour.

“Since trying the device for myself, now on walks I am never without

the aids to awaken all of my senses.”

Walks from a Suitcase.

Whilst visiting our website you may find ‘Walks from a Suitcase.’ This experience allows the listener to get a taste for the outdoors without even having to leave the comfort of their seats!

First I take the listener on a walk across a landscape, (Snowdonia, the Lake District...etc) then expose sensory delights relevant to that landscape: for example, smells and readings from a book of poetry, allowing you to climb steep hills or travel down gushing rivers in your mind.



“Touch the bark and feel the different characteristics of the various trees; lean on the granite gate posts and sense their coolness; brush past stone walls where damp algae caresses and colours the fingers; follow streams whose burbling leads us down the valley and let the whisper of aspen leaves draw us on to further discoveries.”

“Touch, smell and words conjure up images in my head of fresh rafts of bluebells littering the earthy woodland floor, and gushing sparkling streams vivid with life.”

“I smell the sweet scent of wild flowers, yet to bloom. By a river I take relief images of tiny bird and animal prints embedded in the soft mud. Near an estuary, I hear the recorded calls of birds communicating from high up in the arms of trees. The woodland is alive.”

Other Services available on our Website

- Voice Trails: Snowdonia National Park Authority has commissioned Fieldsman Trails to produce walks information for MP3 downloads from their website (Maps are also available for transcribing into Large print and Braille formats)
- Relief Maps of the Lake District, Snowdonia and Peak District
- Talking Pictures
- Personalised Tactile Greeting Cards in Large Print, Braille and ClearView

(You can view and order the above at: www.fieldsmanbookshop.co.uk)

Experimenting

Recently I've been re-modelling the Beatrix Potter animal characters and some of Alfred Wainwrights mountain drawings in a relief tactile format.

Using our website you can create tactile pictures of flowers, fossils, butterflies, spiders' webs, silhouettes of birds and sparkling star constellations – in fact, pretty much anything you fancy. Those of birds also come with a sound bite for a fantastic talking picture!

Contact

If you should be interested in finding out any more information before heading out on your next exploration please visit:

www.fieldsmantrails.com/www.fieldsmanbookshop.co.uk

Happy adventures!

Insight Radio

RNIB's Insight Radio is designed to communicate the needs, interests and aspirations of blind and partially sighted people throughout the UK.

On air 24 hours a day, the station is available to everyone and is designed to enhance the lives of individuals living with sight loss by using radio to keep listeners bang up to date with all the latest news, newspapers, books, events and features. Insight Radio allows the listener to learn about new technology, benefits, campaigning and the skills to lead independent yet inclusive lives. From cooking and DIY to movie reviews, as well as a wide range of issues affecting the blind and partially sighted community, the content on the radio station is produced with sight loss in mind.

Presenters of Insight Radio are all either blind or partially sighted, ensuring you'll hear informed, intelligent and in-touch broadcasting. One of these presenters, Jill Daley, broadcaster of the 'Daley Lunch,' lost her sight as a teenager to a condition called diabetic retinopathy, an illness that left her completely blind. Living with sudden sight loss at such a young age posed considerable difficulties for both Jill and her family: "I felt that the world, which was about to become my oyster, suddenly became a tightly closed clam. I thought, 'What the hell am I going to do with my life now and how am I going to go about it?'"

At the time, Jill was living in Ireland, and had never met anyone that was visually impaired let alone heard of any organisations to help someone like her: "The experience of sight loss left me feeling trapped, helpless and frustrated by the lack of information available to me."

“Insight Radio has been like a life line for me, in the respect that it’s given me back my feeling of self worth and my self esteem. Through trying to educate others about living with blindness, I have found out so many things about myself.”



With studios in Glasgow, London, Cardiff and Edinburgh providing local training opportunities for both blind and partially sighted people to learn about radio and develop core skills - such as confidence, team work and IT competencies - RNIB is working to reduce the social isolation felt by many people who live with sight loss.

You can tune in to Insight Radio on www.insightradio.co.uk, on Sky Channel 0188, Freesat 777 and in Glasgow on 101FM.

South Wales Talking Magazine

In the spring of 1971 Jack Treeby was at home in Whitchurch, Cardiff when his attention was drawn to an interview on Radio Wales. Aberystwyth had launched a talking newspaper for the blind. Jack listened intently as he had already lost his ability to read the local newspaper due to a severe eye problem. What was a talking newspaper? Ronald Sturt went on to explain that volunteers read extracts from their local newspaper on to tape and then make copies to be sent through the post to the visually impaired.

Jack was very impressed and realised what a great idea it was. If Aberystwyth could have a talking newspaper then Cardiff should have one too. He wasn't someone to sit back and dream so a small advert placed in the South Wales Echo soon brought about a meeting of potential volunteers in June of that year. Jack bought a small number of the RNIB talking book cassettes and plans were put in place to record the first edition of the South Wales Talking Magazine in time for Christmas. It had been decided that a magazine style programme was to be the first publication. Volunteer reporters went out on to the streets of Cardiff to capture the sights and sounds of 1971's festive celebrations. A 30 minute edition featuring a Salvation Army band, Father Christmas and shopper's thoughts about the extra expense at this time of year was the result.

One major problem was the fact that not enough money had been raised to buy our own duplicating equipment. Fortunately in the true sense of charitable work Aberystwyth offered to produce the 25 copies we needed for our first listeners. After a couple of months of travelling back and forth the South Wales Talking Magazine Association (SWTMA) was up and running with its own equipment and had already doubled its monthly listenership to 50.

By 1975 the idea of talking newspapers and magazines had caught the imagination right across the UK and our own listeners had begun to ask

for a weekly publication based on the South Wales Echo. With the Echo's permission and help the SWTMA launched the Cardiff Talking Newspaper. Selected news articles were read from the newspaper, not the major headline news covered in depth by radio and TV but non-headline grabbing news that would otherwise go unheard.

It's in this way that both the monthly Talking Magazine and weekly Talking Newspaper have continued over the years until we have now reached our 40th anniversary. We're proud to say that since that first edition, back in December 1971, we have never missed an edition of the magazine and so have, in our archives, hundreds of hours of interviews including some very famous voices and reports on important events of the past. Continuity is so important and this not only applies to the publications but also to our volunteers. Several have been with the Association for literally decades and Tony Charles, a founder member with Jack Treeby, is still actively involved in the production team.

In 1974 it had become apparent that an organisation to establish and co-ordinate the new talking newspaper was needed. It was Jack, together with Tony, who helped establish the Talking Newspaper Association of the UK, now known as the Talking News Federation. Jack was elected as its first vice chairman and travelled many miles giving talks and encouraging the development of new projects.

So what does the future hold for the SWTMA? Our change of format to digital CD was a very carefully considered step. Many TNs have moved directly to memory sticks rather than CDs but our 12 months of research showed that our mostly elderly listeners didn't want to cope with 'new' technology and were more than pleased to receive the familiar discs distributed by RNIB talking books. Our large membership of 800, spread across a large catchment area, also made it impossible to provide memory stick players and instructions. Our decision has proved to be the right one for our association in the immediate future as our membership numbers have increased. However this doesn't rule out memory sticks altogether. With digital technology we will be able to offer a choice of formats in the future.

Over the years we've been immensely fortunate to have the support of the Cardiff Institute for the Blind (now Cardiff Vales and Valleys) who have provided us with the accommodation for our studio and office. Their backing has enabled us to continue our work throughout the years and expand from the initial 25 listeners to 800.



Memorable dates in SWTMA history...

1977: our own first studio was constructed within the CIB

1986: introduced the compact cassette to replace the large RNIB talking book cassettes.

3rd October 1991: Diana, Princess of Wales opened the new Resource Centre in the CIB and also our refurbished studio.

By 1992 the number of listeners had grown to the extent that we had to introduce a computerised bar code reader to control the flow of cassettes through the office.

2000: the 3rd generation of our studio/office complex was opened by rugby legend Gareth Edwards.

2010: goodbye to tape cassettes and hello to CDs!

Other audio services...

Calibre Audio Library

Calibre offers a free, nationwide postal service of audio books. They have a choice of over 8,000 titles for both adults and children, covering fiction and non-fiction, which have been recorded unabridged. There is no subscription fee, and no charge for postage of the books, although there is a charge if you require a printed catalogue. Three formats are available: MP3 format compact disc, USB memory stick or cassette.

For more information, telephone 01296 432 339 or send an email to enquiries@calibre.org.uk. The website is www.calibre.org.uk.

Christian Resources from Torch Trust

Torch Trust has a wide range of bibles, bible study aids and other Christian material in a variety of accessible formats including Audio CD, DAISY CD, MP3 CD and cassette. There is a charge for many items, although some are free.

To find out more, contact Torch Trust on 01858 438260, email info@torchtrust.org or visit the website www.torchtrust.org.

Listening Books

Listening Books is a postal and internet-based library service of books for adults and children, individuals and organisations, and for both leisure and learning. Books can be accessed in three ways: by MP3 CD (delivered through the post), by on-line streaming or by downloading to a PC and then to a portable device such as iPod. There is a membership fee which starts at £20 per year.

For more information, go to www.listening-books.org.uk or telephone 020 7407 9417.

National Talking Newspapers and Magazines

Provide a wide range of newspapers and magazines on audio CD, DAISY and on-line. There is a subscription charge which varies according to the publication, but delivery is free to those who qualify for the 'Articles for the Blind' concession. A catalogue listing all available titles and their charges can be downloaded from the website.

For more information, telephone 01435 866102 or go to www.tnauk.org.uk.

Soundtalking

Visit the website www.soundtalking.co.uk and you can sign up to receive free audio versions of the Argos catalogue, and publications from Sainsbury's, M&S and Waitrose.

A list of Talking Newspapers and Magazines in Wales (not comprehensive - this has come from WCB's database so please let us know if we've missed anyone out)

Ammanford TN	Papur Llafar Aberconwy
Bell Bank Club (Hay-on-Wye)	Papur Sain Ceredigion
Carmarthen & District TN	Papurau Bro Dwyfor ar Dap
Colwyn Link Tape Magazine	Pembrokeshire TN
Llyfrau Llafar Cymru	Powys TN
Cynon Valley TN	Rhondda TN
Dolgellau & District TN	Rhuddlan Borough TN
Flintshire TN	Ruthin TN
Gwent TN	Sain Clwyd Sound TN
Gwynedd TN	South Wales Talking Magazine
Merthyr Tydfil TN	Swansea & Gower TN
Milford Mercury TN	Y Gadwyn TN
Neath & District TN	Yale TN
Ogwr TN	Ysgol Rhiwabon TN

Cardiff Multicultural Mela

Cardiff Multicultural Mela is an annual event held in the Oval Basin in Cardiff Bay. Sight Support has a stall at this event every year, and this year, despite the mixed weather, hundreds of visitors visited the stall. It held information on different eye conditions particularly prevalent in minority ethnic communities and in many different languages. There was also information on Wales Eye Care Initiative (WECI), Primary Eyecare Acute Referral Scheme and Low Vision Scheme.

Nirmala Pisavadia, Development Manager at Sight Support who was manning the stall for the day said, “This event always has a wonderful mix of diverse ethnic communities of all ages who attend this annual event to enjoy the good food and the music but most people will stop at our stall to ask all sorts of questions. One young man just wanted to know more about glaucoma because his grandfather had lost his sight through this condition. I explained exactly what glaucoma is using the model of the eye and in a simple language that he could understand. I told him he should have his eyes examined on a regular basis and gave him a list of optometrists in his area who could undertake this examination (Wales Eye Health Examination). He was extremely grateful and said ‘I wish someone had explained this to me earlier – I now understand my grand-dad’s condition better and will definitely take more care of my eyes and go for regular eye examinations’”.

Nirmala said “it is helpful that I speak several languages (Hindi, Gujarati, Punjabi and Swahili) and this always helps when someone stops to ask a question but has difficulty explaining their problems in English. They are always delighted when you speak to them in their own language and explain about the different eye conditions and how many of them are preventable through better diet and lifestyle and the importance of regular eye examinations.”

Sight Support is very grateful to Novartis for the funding to allow them to have a stall at the Cardiff Multicultural Mela this year, because with so many cut backs it would have been difficult otherwise.

Have your say!

Specialist Employment Programmes

The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) is conducting a public consultation in response to the independent report 'Getting in, staying in and getting on', which looked at how the UK government could deliver better specialist employment support services to help disabled people into work.

The report covered topics such as the Access to Work scheme, The Work Programme and the future of disability employer Remploy. Employment is an issue which affects many visually impaired people and the government is particularly keen to hear from anyone who has a health condition, or who has used employment services. To order a copy of the consultation (including audio and Braille versions), write to Sayce Consultation Team, Disability and Work Division, Department for Work and Pensions, 3rd Floor, Steel City House, West Street, Sheffield, S1 2GQ.

Full information is also available from the website www.dwp.gov.uk/consultations. The closing date is 17 October 2011.

Housing Benefit Reform – Supported Housing

The Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) has launched a consultation on the Government's proposals to change the way Housing Benefit helps those living in supported housing within the social and voluntary sector with their rent. They are seeking views to inform policy development as they look to re-design the way in which Housing Benefit helps with the higher rents sometimes faced by those needing support to live independently, such as the elderly or those with disabilities. The public consultation applies to England, Scotland and Wales.

The consultation is aimed primarily at those involved in the commissioning, funding and providing of supported

housing. Comments are also welcomed from those needing support to live independently, such as vulnerable older and disabled people, and those who represent their views.

Full details of the consultation, and details of how to respond, are on the DWP's website: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/consultations/2011/supported-housing.shtml>.

Contact: Dave Jones, Department for Work and Pensions, 1st Floor, Caxton House, Tothill Street, London SW1H 9NA. Email Dave.Jones@dwp.gsi.gov.uk Responses must be received by 9 October 2011.

Miscellaneous

Unequal Cuts Discussion on 15 September

Disability Wales in partnership with Flintshire Disability Forum and Flintshire Local Voluntary Council are inviting disabled people to discuss their experiences of national and local government cutbacks on benefits and services.

- Would you like to know more about the Government's plans?
- Are you concerned about the impact on you and your family?
- Maybe you've already experienced a loss of benefits and/or service.

If so, come and tell them. This one day event will also provide information on the new Equality Act and what it means for disabled people. For further information and to book a place, please contact:

Disability Wales, Bridge House, Caerphilly Business Park, Van Road, Caerphilly CF83 3GW Tel: 029 20887325, email: info@disabilitywales.org, website: www.disabilitywales.org

Glaucoma Patients Support Group Meeting on 30 September

There will be a Glaucoma Patients Support Group Meeting on Friday 30 September at the Residents Community Centre, Princess of Wales Hospital, Bridgend from 1.30 to 4 pm.

Anyone with an interest in the condition, whether they have been diagnosed recently or have had it for a long time, is welcome to come along and find out more about glaucoma and how it can be managed. Please contact Karen Phillips on 01656 75 21 79.

Sight Village London: 1 - 2 November

QAC Sight Village returns to Kensington Town Hall in London on 1st and 2nd November. The event is free of charge and will be of interest to visually impaired people and their families, professionals working in the field and employers. Visitors will have the chance to find out about the latest technology, support services and daily living equipment.

For more information, and to pre-register, visit the website www.qacsightvillage.org.uk.

New College Worcester Family Day 19 November

New College, the national residential school and college for visually impaired children aged 11 to 19, is organising a Family Fun Day on Saturday 19 November. The event is free to families with a visually impaired child, and activities which will be available include cake decorating, pony rides, climbing wall and art workshop.

To book a place, go to the website www.newcollegeworcester.co.uk and take the link to 'Events' or telephone the College on 01905 763933.

Royal National College for the Blind (RNC) Open Days

The RNC in Hereford is organising a series of open days for professionals who work with visually impaired clients, giving them the opportunity to find out about life at the college. Each of the dates is targeted towards a specific group - contact the college for more information. Places must be booked in advance from RNC Marketing by ringing 01432 37662 or sending an email to info@rnca.ac.uk. More information is available on their website, www.rnca.ac.uk.

For prospective students and their families, tailored visits to the college can be arranged by ringing the enquiry line on 01432 376621.

Report from Sight Village: Portable ICT

Visio Book

Launched at Sight Village this year was the prototype of the new Visio Book HD video magnifier from Baum. Not much bigger than a notebook PC and weighing only 3.5kg, it is a very portable system with an integrated HD 12" LED screen and over 4 hours battery life, as well as features including a range of colour schemes.

Print, handwriting or objects can be placed under the camera with the magnified image then displayed on screen. It can also be used for distance viewing, although the camera is fixed. This means that the unit would need to be moved accordingly. To be launched in October, it is expected to cost around £3,000. The cost may well put off a number of private buyers where portability is not required. Come on Baum – DROP THE PRICE! The distance camera also needs to be made more useable.

For updates on when it will be released visit www.pamtrad.co.uk.

Readit Wand

The Readit Wand is a lightweight and powerful OCR / video magnifier with speech output and text re-formatting capabilities that make reading far easier and faster. It weighs just 690 grams and is ideal for users on the go. Simply place your document under the camera and it will be read aloud to you, displayed in your chosen text size, colour and formatting. For more info visit www.visionaid.co.uk.

Voiceye

The Force Ten Company launched the Voiceye Maker. A new way to create accessible documents, Voiceye Maker will create an accessible document from within MS Word. Just open the document, click on the Voiceye add-in and within seconds you have a code added to your document. This code can then be accessed by anyone with a Voiceye App on the Android or iPhone. They can then enlarge, change colour or even have text read out to them, for more information visit www.forcetenco.co.uk.

The Low Vision Scheme: how it works

There has been some confusion regarding the prescription of portable electronic magnifiers through the Welsh Low Vision Service

Over 1,000 electronic pocket size magnifiers (Compact+) have been provided to sight impaired people across Wales through the Low Vision service in the past 2 years. However, there has been some confusion regarding the referral system and entitlement. The Welsh Low Vision Service stated that, “pocket electronic devices are prescribed and ordered for a person when it is recommended by an accredited low vision optometrist practitioner, following an assessment by them and following a trial period of at least two weeks. A recommendation by personnel from social services or a voluntary organisation cannot be accepted under any circumstances.

“Portable electronic magnifiers (Compact+) are expensive, it is for this reason that only one trial device is provided for each optometrist practice. In some areas this can result in a waiting list to try the device. This is unavoidable as we cannot justify the cost of having more than one device in each of the 185 practices the service operates out of. Therefore, those referring a person with a visual impairment to the service will need to keep informed of the situation in their area and advise people accordingly.

“Please refer to www.eyecarewales.nhs.uk to find your nearest low vision accredited practitioner”.

The contract to provide an electronic pocket size magnifier will soon go out to tender. There are dozens of electronic pocket size magnifiers on the market today and they range in size, quality and cost. A large proportion (at least a quarter) of people who use a portable electronic magnifier (Compact+) for the trial period decide that the device is not suitable for them.

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Please send articles and news items to the above address and mark the envelope "Roundup". You may also send to richard@wcb-ccd.org.uk

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